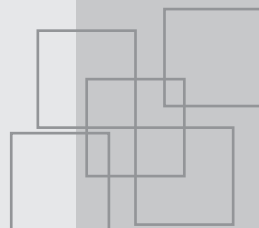


Swedish Muslim Media Consumption: A Report from the Digital Islam in Europe Project

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THIS REPORT PROVIDES a concise summary of the Swedish part of the CHANSE project, *DIGITISLAM: Digital Islam across Europe: Understanding Muslims' Participation in Online Islamic Environments*, funded by Forte (2021-01599).¹ The project aims to enhance understanding of how individuals who self-identify as Muslims produce, use, and consume content online, including social media and other digital resources. It compares five countries: Great Britain, Poland, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden. This report focuses on findings from Sweden.

The research is guided by the following key questions: *What constitutes reliable content? Which languages are preferred? What information channels do Muslims in Sweden use?* In addition to survey data, the report incorporates insights from interviews with Muslim media producers.

1 The Swedish project comprises of two data collection parts that have been ethically reviewed and approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. (Etikprövningsnämnden, Dnr 2022-07127-01 samt Dnr 2023-05662-02)

The intended audience of the report includes Swedish organizations, authorities and religious communities. Knowing the types of digital resources consumed and produced by Muslims, as well as their language preferences, is important for communication and public information strategies. This knowledge can help to optimize social communication and provide a clearer picture of the contemporary Muslim digital media landscape in Sweden.

The report uses the term ‘Muslim/s’ to refer to individuals who self-identify as such, regardless of whether or how they practice Islam. In line with previous research (Thurfjell & Willander, 2021), the study found that many respondents identified as Muslim, despite not being affiliated with religious organizations or actively participating in rituals such as prayer, fasting or observing Ramadan. The study therefore covers Muslims in the broadest sense, including both practicing and non-practicing Muslims.

Moreover, the Swedish Muslim media landscape is diverse. It encompasses organizations and individuals who engage in discussions about Islamic theology, as well as individuals who may signal their Muslim identity through their names or dress while sharing content about their lifestyles, such as recipes, fitness routines, and leisure activities. This project examined selected aspects of this landscape.

The CHANSE project is innovative from both national and international perspectives. Few studies have examined how and why Muslims consume and produce digital content about Islam, and none have done so in Sweden.

Internationally, research has largely focused on analyzing content on Muslim websites, as well as on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, rather than surveying or interviewing consumers and producers of this content (see, for example, Kaati, 2017; Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017; Sorgenfrei, 2021; Stjernholm, 2024). While these studies are valuable, they offer limited insight into how Muslims utilize digital resources and their motivations for consuming and producing media. This is the contribution of this report.

CHANSE – research design

The Swedish part of the CHANSE project comprised a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The following sections report on data collection and findings separately.

The survey

THE SURVEY WAS administered by LORE (Laboratory of Opinion Research) and the University of Gothenburg's citizen panel. It was distributed to 75,000 individuals recruited either through self-registration or random sampling (USS) by LORE, enhancing reliability. While these methods strengthen survey quality, the web panel design necessitates caution in generalizing the results (Forsman et al., 2014).

There are no official records of religious affiliation in Sweden. Therefore, all LORE panelists were first asked about their religious identity (see Table 1). Of the 51,270 respondents, 268 (0.5%) identified as Muslim.

All 268 were invited to participate in the survey, with 168 (63%) accepting and completing it. Although the number of Muslim respondents may seem small, low rates of religious identification are common in Swedish surveys (Willander, 2019; Willander & Stockman, 2020). In our survey, 44.5% of respondents reported having no religion, 29.5% identified as Christian and 17.1% as atheist. Factors influencing these responses include the sensitive nature of religious identity (Thurfjell, 2015) and sociocultural perceptions of religious practice (Willander, 2019). Furthermore, Muslim identity is frequently stigmatized (Larsson, 2025).

Overall, attitudes towards religion make it difficult to use standard methods of representative sampling. This study is therefore one of several that have employed innovative methods in an attempt to engage with Muslim groups (Brekke et al., 2019; Thurfjell & Willander, 2021).

Table 1. Self-assessed religious identity in Sweden 2024. Source: LORE web panel, Gothenburg University

	n	%
Christian	15 138	29,53
Muslim	268	0,52
Buddhist	257	0,5
Hindu	20	0,04
Jew	143	0,28
Atheist	8 759	17,08
No religion	22 825	44,52
None of the above	3 259	6,36
Do not want to answer	601	1,17
Total	51 270	100

As our survey was only sent to a fraction of the citizens' panel participants, it is even more important to consider who chose to respond in order to ensure the reliability of the results. Table 2 below therefore reports on who responded to our survey. The respondent characteristics (Table 2) indicate roughly equal gender distribution (47% women and 53% men), relatively high age (63% are over 40 years old), high educational attainment (68% have a university education) and sound financial status (63%). Around 75% of respondents have a migration background.

Table 2. Socioeconomic description of the sample Källa: LORE, Gothenburg university 2024. n=167.

	n	%
Gender		
Woman	73	47
Man	81	53
Age		
39 years or younger	57	37
40 years or older	96	63
Education		
Upper secondary school or lower	48	32
University education or degree	103	68
Self-assessed finances		
Difficulty making ends meet	18	12
Neither difficulty nor easy	39	26
Easy to make ends meet	95	63

	n	%
Migration		
No migration	37	25
Migration	113	75

We also asked questions about religious affiliation and practice. Here, a majority (69%) answered that they identify as Sunni Muslims and a minority (14%) that they identify as Shia Muslims. Table 3 - where we report on religious identity and practice, also shows that 12% regularly participate in weekly prayers organized by mosques, while just over four in ten (44%) state that they pray daily.

By comparison, it can be mentioned that approximately 5% of Sweden's population participates in church services regularly or the equivalent of a typical week and that approximately 15% pray to God on a weekly basis (Willander, 2019, pp. 24-26).

In the church traditions that are in the minority in Sweden (the Ecumenical Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Methodist Church, the Catholic Church, or the Orthodox Churches), seven out of ten report that they participate in church services every week and two out of three pray every week (Willander, 2019). Those who self-identify as Muslims in our survey thus practice to a somewhat greater extent than the general population, but not to an extent that corresponds to those in Sweden affiliated with church traditions such as the Pentecostal Church, the Methodist Church, the Catholic Church, or the Orthodox Churches in.

Table 3. Religious tradition and practice Source: DIGITISLAM survey for Sweden 2024, n:168

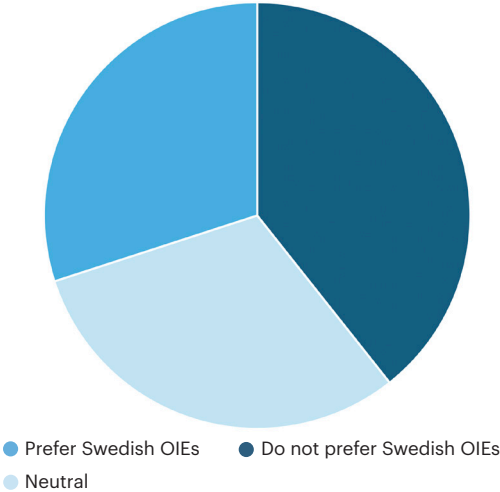
	n	%
Tradition		
Sunni	116	69
Shia	23	14
Other	18	11
Participation in Mosque		
Never	69	41
Not regularly or less than every week	66	39
Regularly every week	20	12
Pray		
Never	47	28
Not regularly or less than every week	38	23
Prays daily	74	44

In addition to those who identify as Sunni or Shia, 11% respond that they identify with another Muslim tradition or just as Muslim without specifying a tradition.

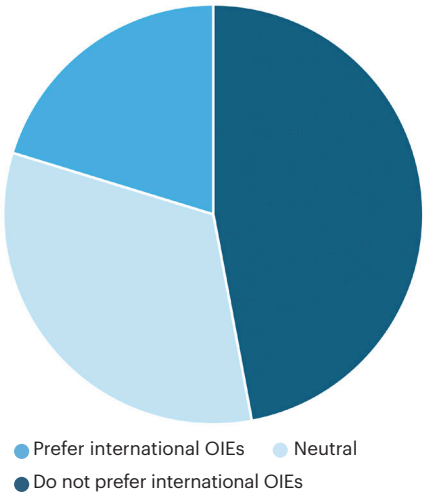
As can be seen in Table 3, four out of ten respondents to the survey never visit a mosque. This sporadic contact raises questions about where Muslims prefer to obtain information about Islam. Figures 1 to 3 show that Muslims in Sweden prefer information about Islam from Swedish organizations (30%). The following are preferred in descending order: information from organizations abroad (20%), and information from independent preachers/lecturers (16%).

Figures 1–3: Which do you prefer when seeking online information about Islam? (Source: DIGITISLAM survey for Sweden. 2024, n=148-153)

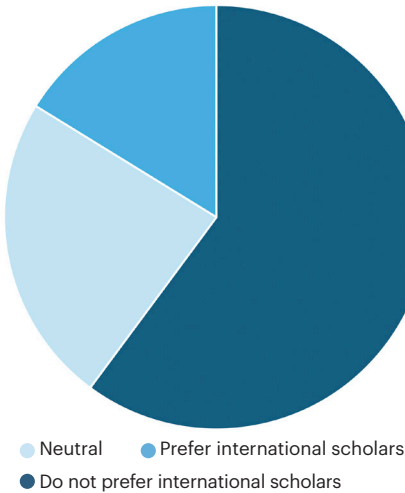
Information from Muslim organizations in Sweden



Information from Muslim organizations abroad



Information from international scholars

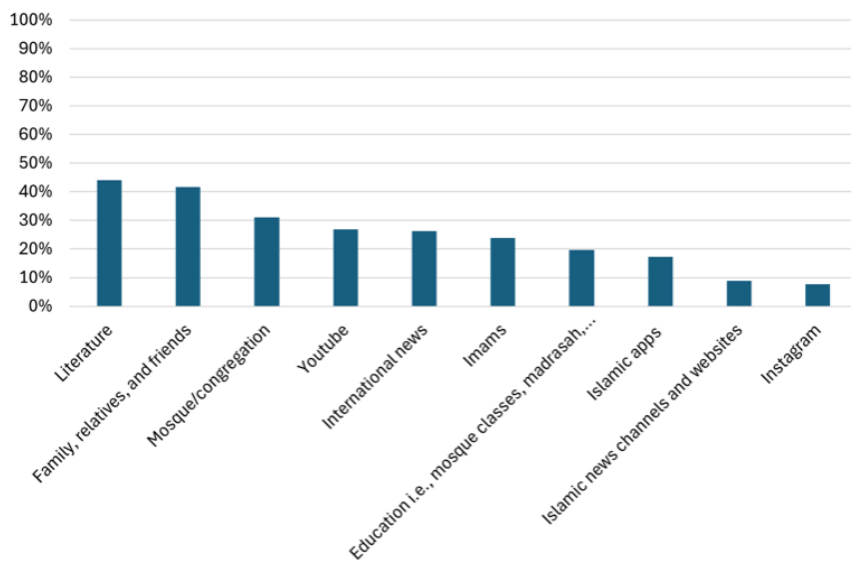


Based on the survey responses, Muslim organizations in Sweden and abroad, along with independent preachers and lecturers, were responsible for no more than a quarter of the responses. The fact that the majority showed indifference or a lack of interest in information from these sources suggests that people seek information about Islam elsewhere. Alternatively, it could mean that people do not seek much information about Islam at all.

To deepen knowledge about Muslim organizations in Sweden and abroad, as well as independent preachers and lecturers, a broader question was asked about where the most credible information about Islam could be found. Thirteen alternatives were listed here, and the ten that received ten or more votes are shown in Figure 4. The most popular alternative was literature (44%). It should be noted that the survey did not specify what was meant by the term ‘literature’. It could therefore refer to many different types of literature.

Figure 4. Where do you find the ‘correct’ knowledge about Islam?

Source: DIGITISLAM survey for Sweden. 2024, n:168



Next came ‘family, relatives and friends’ (42%), followed by the three options most closely associated with Muslim organizations in Sweden and abroad, which received 20-30% of responses: ‘mosque/congregation’ (31%), ‘imams’ (24%) and ‘education’, which in this context was clarified as ‘lectures in mosques, madrasas², etc.’ Therefore, slightly more people have confidence that the most credible knowledge about Islam is found in the mosque or congregation (31%) than the proportion who prefer to obtain information from this source (27%).

The three options with fewer than ten respondents, which are therefore not reported separately, were ‘Swedish school’, ‘Swedish news’ and ‘TikTok’. The first two are interesting in relation to the languages that respondents preferred to use when searching for information about Islam. It emerged that Swedish was the most popular language (67%), followed by English (47%). Arabic was third with 18%. This distribution of languages shows the potential for development by both Swedish mosques and Swedish schools and news outlets.

The fact that TikTok falls outside the list of credible sources, while Instagram and YouTube were chosen by more than ten respondents, can be seen in relation to the group’s more general internet habits. Here, two out of three (63%) answer that they use social media daily and a further 22% use social media on a weekly basis. The proportion who state that they have a user profile on the media mentioned above was: Instagram 70%, of which just under half (46%) post content, YouTube 61%, of which only a few produce their own content, and TikTok 39%, of which 19% state that they post their own content. In other words, TikTok is a service that is used to a lesser extent than Instagram and YouTube.

2 *Madrasah* denotes an Islamic institution for higher learning in Islamic theology and practice. Although the term is seldom used in the Swedish context, it is common in Great Britain. It is used in the Swedish survey for the sake of translatability between Swedish and English surveys.

The Interviews

TO ILLUSTRATE AND contextualize the survey results, a number of semi-structured interviews were also conducted with people who identified themselves as Muslims, produced material, or participated in discussions on social media about Islam and ‘Muslimness’. Those included in this part of the project were based partly on our previous contacts (‘snowball method’) and partly on those who volunteered to be interviewed. It was generally difficult to recruit influencers and media producers who felt comfortable being defined as producers of Muslim digital resources.

Although the purpose of the interviews was to supplement and deepen the discussion about Muslim digital resources, it is important to emphasize that the following examples should be considered as individual voices only: they do not represent a sample of the wider population. There is still a great need for more research into those who produce Muslim content in digital resources.

Those interviewed expressed an awareness that what is published and disseminated has different consequences on social media. While some adapt what they publish - especially if they have followers in several different countries - others choose not to adapt to the wishes and needs of their audience. Those who adapt may, for example, point out that what is seen as luxury and success in Sweden can be eye-catching if they have followers in countries where the economy is weaker or where the environment or political landscape is different, and then they choose not to publish such material. Others point out that certain topics have become more sensitive over time. While they did not previously reflect on posting pictures or stories about the hajj (the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca), this is something that some today see as sensitive or even unthinkable to publish. Others, however, are not as concerned about posting this type of content and emphasize that it is not possible to protect yourself against those who hate and threaten regardless of what you publish.

The range of digital resources has grown over time, and today there are several platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and X (Twitter). Both consumption and production are affected by the growing supply. Some of those we interviewed use multiple languages and different channels when communicating with their followers. Knowledge about who uses what and why they prefer certain media channels or languages over others is unclear to both ourselves and those we interviewed.

However, one of those we interviewed emphasized that Facebook is primarily used by older people (35+) and by those active in Muslim associations, while Instagram is primarily used by slightly younger users (18-45 years old). If this observation is correct, it does not seem to differ much from non-Muslims who also use social media and follow similar patterns. Even in more general surveys of social media use, it is clear that certain platforms are used more by older people, while younger people prefer other digital resources (Internetstiftelsen, 2025)

What is published on different channels therefore seems to be governed to some extent by a pre-understanding of consumers' needs and demands, but it also depends on which digital resources they prefer. As a producer, especially if aiming to reach many followers, it is reasonable to adapt both the choice of platforms, language, and the content produced.

Even on this point, Muslim media producers do not seem to differ from other producers who use similar digital resources.

Those interviewed stated that they have different strategies for reaching their audience. This includes awareness of what topics to write about, the choice of color, sound, and backgrounds and timing when publishing. Timing could relate to publishing content when Muslim holidays coincide with Swedish holidays such as Midsummer or when extraordinary events happen in a Muslim-majority country (for example, an earthquake, war, or similar). Certain content can also be designed to create debate and evoke emotions, which in turn leads to more people sharing content. In some cases, this may contribute to more people following an account, while in other cases it may mean that some followers have abandoned a channel or platform.

Some of those we interviewed do not aim to talk specifically about Islam or ‘Muslim issues’; their media channels focus on other topics such as leisure activities or simply being a good role model in society. At the same time, it is reasonable to assume that followers know that the content creator is Muslim because the name, clothing, or language may indicate their identity. Even when Islam and Muslimness are not specifically in focus, producers can highlight holidays or historical events in Islamic history. Such holidays, such as Ramadan, are often associated with food and traditions, but also with messages such as compassion for the poor and the need to think about one’s loved ones. These topics can to some extent be seen as universal (i.e., meaning, belonging, suffering, joy, community, etc.) and thus seem to have the potential to resonate with both Muslim and non-Muslim followers. However, such issues can also be perceived as Muslim or connected to Islam and are therefore sensitive for some followers. One interviewee reflected on this as follows:

In the beginning, I noticed quite clearly that every time it came up in some way ... that is, something to do with Islam ... a significant number of people unfollowed [the account].

However, this type of reaction does not seem to worry all interviewees. Some relate to the risk of losing followers by stating that they do not want those who do not appreciate the content to follow their channels.

However, this type of reaction does not seem to worry all interviewees. Some relate to the risk of losing followers by stating that they do not want those who do not appreciate the content to follow their channels. Accordingly, it does not automatically become a problem if someone leaves because, for example, they say *id mubarak* (“blessed Eid”) in a post. Some producers may choose to block or pause certain people, but this does not apply to everyone. Decisions about who leaves or unfollows an account and why are unclear to both ourselves and our informants. Reasons may vary: in some cases, followers may dislike what they perceive as Muslim and Islamic issues; in other cases, Muslims may think certain content is un-Islamic or incorrectly represents Islam.

Some interviewees believe that the tone on social media is often harsh and merciless, regardless of the producer or content. Many comments seem to come from bots or fake accounts that produce anti-Muslim remarks, essentially repeating the same harangues. One informant matter-of-factly asked whether it is reasonable to ‘get irritated because an AI is talking about me’. Social media itself can support a harsh discussion climate by offering anonymity to those who wish to hate, threaten, or ridicule (see Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021).

The importance of producers of non-theological messages that are still linked to Muslim identity also emerged in our interviews. Some emphasized that such digital resources can create meeting and contact points between different people, both Muslims and non-Muslims. There is hope that such non-theological Muslim producers can serve as role models, inspiring followers to think, ‘If he can, so can we’. One interviewee stated:

A kind of normalization process, for example with the Muslim veil, because many ... are known for it ... it has been de-dramatized that you can, for example, follow a Muslim, and I think social media has done that ...

Some interviewees also believe social media content has changed over time. Initially, many organizations (e.g., mosques) published one-way information about Islam, but today they present their lives and how to live as a Muslim in a non-Muslim majority society. Digital resources have thus contributed to a kind of democratization and pluralization of what it can mean to be a Muslim in Sweden.

Discussion

THE SWEDISH PART of the CHANSE project shows that, to the extent that Muslims in Sweden are interested in information about Islam, they are happy to turn to Muslim organizations and consume content in Swedish. This suggests that Swedish organizations, authorities and religious communities can continue to publish content in Swedish and expect it to reach the public.

Literature is considered to be the most credible source of knowledge about Islam. However, this category is somewhat ambiguous and can cover anything from religious scripture to fiction written by or about Muslims. The relationship between literature and credibility is an important topic for future research.

Among the voices highlighted in the interviews, it is clear that content is designed with media platform design and public perceptions of conversation about Islam in mind. Some producers adapt content to maintain followers and avoid threats or hatred, while others accept that certain content may lead to fewer followers or exposure to threats. This raises follow-up questions about how the Muslim media landscape has developed as a result of adaptation and assumptions. Since Swedish organizations, authorities and religious communities are part of the Muslim media landscape, they are also likely to be affected by these processes. The results invite strategic discussions about how these communication challenges are being addressed. Such discussions may concern, for example, whether a broad following should be prioritized or whether the focus should be on reaching specific groups.

Summary

- Survey based on 168 responses (63% response rate) and a smaller number of interviews.
- Swedish is the preferred language in digital environments.
- 30% prefer information about Islam from Muslim congregations in Sweden.
- Instagram and YouTube are more popular than TikTok.
- Muslim social media producers are aware of audience perceptions and tailor content accordingly.
- The Swedish Muslim digital landscape is heterogeneous, combining religious and lifestyle content.

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